

The History of 911

The concept of a single emergency number originated in Europe and Great Britain. In 1937, England initiated a single emergency number, which could be accessed from anywhere in the country, known as "9-9-9".

In the United States, interest in the idea of a single, universal, emergency number accelerated in 1967, and the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice supported the concept. In November 1967 the U.S. Senate, with the House of Representatives concurring, issued a resolution which stated:

"Resolved...That it is the sense of the Congress that the United States should have one uniform nationwide fire reporting telephone number and one uniform nationwide police reporting telephone number."

The first implementation of 911 was in Haleyville Al. in January 1968. The town had a population of about 4,500 then, and was serviced by the Alabama Phone Company.

In March 1973, the White House's Office of Telecommunications issued a national policy statement which recognized the benefits of 9-1-1, encouraged the nationwide adoption of 9-1-1, and provided for the establishment of a Federal Information Center to assist units of government in planning and implementation. The intense interest in the concept of 9-1-1 can be attributed primarily to the recognition of characteristics of modern society, i.e., increased incidences of crimes, accidents, and medical emergencies, inadequacy of existing emergency reporting methods, and the continued growth and mobility of the population.

In the early 1970s, AT&T began the development of sophisticated features for the 9-1-1 with a pilot program in Alameda County, California. The feature was "selective call routing." This pilot program supported the theory behind the Executive Office of Telecommunication's Policy. By the end of 1976, 9-1-1 was serving about 17% of the population of the United States. In 1979, approximately 26% of the population of the United States had 9-1-1 service, and nine states had enacted 9-1-1 legislation. At this time, 9-1-1 service was growing at the rate of 70 new systems per year. By 1987, those figures had grown to indicate that 50% of the US population had access to 9-1-1 emergency service numbers.

In addition, Canada recognized the advantages of a single emergency number and chose to adopt 9-1-1 rather than use a different means of emergency reporting service, thus unifying the concept and giving 9-1-1 international stature.

At the end of the 20th century, nearly 93% of the population of the United States was covered by some type of 9-1-1 service. Ninety-five percent of that coverage was Enhanced 9-1-1. Approximately 96% of the geographic US is covered by some type of 9-1-1.

Many changes and upgrades have been made since the first 9-1-1 calls were placed and the advent of new technologies such as cell phones and Voice over IP (internet) phones have forced many new changes to the 9-1-1 system. This system is always being upgraded and improved to provide people with the best possible help in an Emergency situation.

